

Walking by Faith

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, I'd like us to turn back to 2 Corinthians chapter 5. We're going to look at a tiny little phrase that's tucked away in chapter 5, but one that is one of the most important statements that the Bible makes.
- You'll find it in verse 7, and it would be great to have verses 6 and 7 on the screen as we go through the sermon if that's okay. This little phrase is crucial for understanding the nature of Christianity as a belief system, and it's crucial for understanding what living as a Christian actually involves.
- So even though it's a very tiny phrase, it's a massive statement, it's something that we all need to think about. What phrase is it? Well, it's the words of verse 7. I'll pick up from verse 6 where Paul writes, So we are always of good courage.
- We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.
- And that's our title. That's the topic I want us to think about, Walking by Faith. And I want us to think about that under two headings, understanding the Christian faith and understanding the Christian's walk.
- [1 : 1 1] Understanding the Christian faith, understanding the Christian's walk. So first of all, thinking about the Christian faith as a belief system, the statement being made there in verse 7 is crucial for us in order to correct a common and huge misunderstanding that exists in relation to Christianity.
- That misunderstanding is the view that there's a conflict between faith and reason. And I'm sure you've all come across that. Maybe it's something that you've struggled with yourself.
- This whole idea of faith versus reason, it's all around us. And there are people who have come to the conclusion that faith in Jesus Christ and robust, rational thinking are incompatible.
- And that can manifest itself in lots of different ways, and it can affect both believers and unbelievers. Believers, those of us who follow Jesus, we can struggle with this hugely because we can find ourselves confronted with questions about science, philosophy, history, and we respond by saying, well, I don't know, but I just believe.
- And for unbelievers, they'll do the opposite, and they'll see all these questions, and they'll say, well, unless you can give me answers, I won't believe, unless you can prove that God exists, unless you can prove definitively that Jesus rose from the dead, or that these miracles that we never see today actually happened, unless you can prove all these things with empirical evidence, I am not going to believe.
- [2 : 4 6] Lots of people think like this, it's all based on the idea that faith and reason cannot go together. What I want us to see tonight is that the Bible never ever places faith in opposition to reason.
- In other words, it never says we walk by faith, not by reason. It never says that. And it's so crucial for us to recognize this because it's reminding us and teaching us that following Jesus does not mean leaving your brain behind.

And that's such an important thing for us to remember because so many people think that it does, people will think that science has disproved Christianity, that history has undermined the Bible, that philosophy has brought us to a point where we no longer need God.

And of course, all of that is actually very easy to show, to be untrue, even just a little bit of historical knowledge teaches you that because so many of the greatest scientific discoveries that have happened in the last 1000 years have either come from Christians or have come from people who've grown up in societies that have been grounded on Christian influence.

The Bible has been subjected to 2000 years of historical scrutiny, it's still standing. And in fact, today it has more adherence than ever. And every philosophy that has rejected God, when it's pushed to its logical conclusion, offers us nothing but either empty irrational hope or guesswork, or it leaves us as radical skeptics in everything.

[4 : 24] And all of this is reminding us that the Gospel is not asking you to be stupid, blind or ignorant. Instead, we're being reminded that faith and reason go hand in hand.

In other words, Christianity properly understood is a belief system that makes sense. And that means that Christianity is not intellectually embarrassing.

The truth is Christianity is actually incredibly intellectually satisfying. And never be afraid to go on that quest because actually the more you think about it, the more you delve into the depths of how we are to understand the world, how everything is supposed to fit together, the more you will see that the Gospel is the only thing that gives you the answers that you crave.

I would, without hesitation, claim that Christianity is the only worldview that's intellectually satisfying. Now, there's lots that we could say about this, and we could spend all night looking at this.

We could spend a few minutes looking at an example to try and unpack this a little bit more. So, we are trying to claim, I'm trying to claim to you tonight, that Christianity is not opposed to reason.

[5 : 40] Christianity is not irrational. It's the opposite. It is the worldview that gives you an explanation of ultimate reality that makes sense for every day.

And that is what we all need. We need an explanation for ultimate reality that makes sense of the way we live our lives day to day. And in order for us to have that, there needs to be consistency between our underlying philosophy over here and the specific things that we believe here.

Okay? So, on this side, you've got like the underlying philosophy, like the foundation of how you understand the world. And then over here, you've got the specific stuff that you hold to be true and that you live by day to day.

These two things have got to be consistent. That has to be a consistent correspondence between the stuff that you believe to be true day by day and the foundation that all of that stands on.

All of that needs to fit together. I think that that's a reasonable expectation, isn't it? Foundation, day to day beliefs, they should fit together. That's pretty straightforward.

[6 : 50] So, what I want to argue to you tonight is that Christianity is the only philosophy that gives you this.

It's the only philosophy that will give you a foundation that corresponds to beliefs that you can actually live with. Okay? That's what I want you to think about.

It's the belief system that will give you a foundation, the only foundation that gives you beliefs that you can actually live with. And to do that, to prove this, I want to look at the example of racism, and I want to start with David Hume, who is just down the road, a famous statue just a hundred yards down that way.

You can walk past him on your way home from church, famous Scottish philosopher, and in many ways a champion of atheism. And he raised questions against the idea of belief in God in lots of different ways.

One of the ways in which he did that was to present a philosophy that was grounded on a kind of radical skepticism that said that you can't really prove a link between a cause and an effect.

[7 : 59] And at that time, so many of the arguments that were grounded on the existence of God were saying, well, if you think about where did we come from and who came before us and who came before us and who came before us, took you all the way back to think that there must be an ultimate source, it must be God.

Everything must start from somewhere, there must be a link, God must be the ultimate cause of everything. Hume came along and said, you can't prove that.

You can't prove a link, a constant, consistent link between a cause and an effect. And so I tap this lectern, it makes a noise.

And I tap it again, it makes a noise. I tap it again, it makes a noise. And again, it makes a noise. And I do it a million times, it makes a noise. I do it the million and one time and you say, it makes a noise. Hume says, you don't know.

And he's kind of right in a way. Don't quite know. And he's saying, you can't prove it. And so he presented this kind of skeptical philosophy that undermined any idea that you could be certain of anything.

[9 : 07] And that's the really important point about David Hume. And you can't be certain about anything, you can't really prove anything. And that was applied to the existence of God.

That's one thing that David Hume was famous for. The other thing that David Hume was famous for was the fact that he was a racist. And like many historical figures that you read about now, you can see that in their writings, they will say lots of things that speak about white being superior to other races.

In fact, I think they changed the name of some, the Hume terror or something, because they didn't like the fact that they discovered this and they didn't want to name it after him. So his specific belief over here was that he was a racist.

And his underlying philosophy over here was that God doesn't exist and you can't really prove anything. These two positions are intellectually consistent.

And that's the thing I want you to see. These two positions are intellectually consistent. And because of that, his philosophy basically undermines any idea that there's an inherent worth in humanity.

[10 : 21] When we say, just in the same way, you know, you tap the thing a million times and it makes a noise, well, you can't prove that it's going to make a noise. We say all humans are equal and valuable. David Hume says, well, my philosophy says you can't prove that.

And there's a correspondence between his underlying philosophy and his specific belief in regard to races.

Now, thankfully today, hardly anybody follows David Hume's racism, but loads of people follow his philosophy.

And that's leaving us in the situation where you will have the typical young Jen Zeddeth who is absolutely opposed to racism, rightly so.

And that's such a good thing. But they also hold to David Hume's philosophy where it's like, well, there is no ultimate reality and therefore we ultimately can't prove or claim anything.

[11 : 20] And what that means is that even though that anti-racism is brilliant, it's a betrayal of their underlying philosophy. The two don't fit together because by following the atheistic philosophy that rejects God, you pull the foundation away from the moral claims that all people are made equal.

And so what that means is that so many people today don't actually have a philosophical foundation that makes it intellectually impossible to say that racism is okay.

Now, you might be saying, yes, Thomas, fine, that's maybe all true, but there's loads of Christians who have been racists. And that's true as well.

And today there are people who are racist who will claim to be Christians. And in history there were times when entire societies were racist, including many people who would have been genuine believers within that society.

Now, the same problem exists, but it works the other way around. Because as believers, if they were Christians, they hold a philosophy that insists that all humanity is made equal in the image of God.

[12 : 34] And the key point is that if they were racist, that's a betrayal of their underlying philosophy. The two don't correspond. If their underlying philosophy is that we're all made in the image of God, then they are making an intellectual contradiction to be racist.

They're betraying their foundations. Their racism is an irrational departure from their philosophical foundation.

And so you have these contradictory positions. Lastly, you can have a Christian who's opposed to racism, which I would hope, I'm sure, the vast majority of people in here would say that they are.

The reason you know that racism is wrong is because your foundational philosophy is based on the Bible. And that emphatically states that all humanity is equal.

Every single person is made in the image of God. Racism is never, ever anything other than totally, utterly wrong. And that position is intellectually consistent.

[13 : 38] And the key point is that if you say, oh, faith and reason don't go together, it's nonsense. It's not true at all.

In fact, the opposite is to Christianity is the only worldview that gives us an understanding of ultimate reality that makes sense.

That it's the only worldview that gives us an intellectual basis for the truths that we live by day to day. And racism is just one example.

There's many, many, many more. And all around us, you'll find two things. You'll find normal people who live in contradiction. So their whole day-to-day beliefs that they actually have no foundation for. So that's what you'll find in the majority.

Normal people who believe things, but they've got no foundation. The other thing you'll find is philosophers who believe awful things. Because as good philosophers, they will always try to be intellectually consistent.

[14 : 34] So Friedrich Nietzsche will use his nihilistic philosophy to reject the existence of God, and he will conclude that the real meaning of life lies in power and in exerting that power.

And he actually criticized Christians because they did something that he thought was stupid. Christians helped weak people. And Nietzsche thought that was crazy.

Richard Dawkins, as I'm sure many of you will know, uses his naturalistic philosophy to write that ultimately there's no such thing as right and wrong. Peter Singer, an Australian philosopher who works in America, you may be heard of.

He has very, very extreme views. And he uses his philosophy of personhood and the equality of humans and animals to say, and this is a quote, killing a defective infant is not morally equivalent to killing a person.

Sometimes it's not wrong at all. Everybody can turn to all of these philosophers and say, get lost. We are not following you in any of these views.

[15 : 38] And most people agree. But the contradiction lies in the fact that they'll follow Nietzsche and say, well, ultimately there's no meaning. They'll follow Dawkins and say, yeah, the universe is actually a machine.

And they'll follow Singer, not to his extremist, but they will say, well, actually humans and animals should have the same rights. And the way they do that is by divorcing what they actually believe from their intellectual convictions.

In other words, they are the ones who separate faith and reason. Christianity says you don't have to do that. You don't have to do that.

Christianity tells us that ultimate reality is the God of the Bible. He is the God of truth, of order, of beauty, of goodness, of consistency, and most of all of love.

Christianity is the great revelation of that God, of his extraordinary love towards us and how that love has been poured out upon us through his son, Jesus Christ.

[16 : 40] Christianity does not draw a contrast between faith and reason. It does, however, draw a contrast. Not between faith and reason, but between faith and sight.

And that's what you can see in verse seven. And that's such an important thing for us to recognize. So often we think that we want to go through life walking by sight.

We want to be able to see where we're going. We want to see clearly everything that's going on in our lives. And as a result, we want to be able to understand everything that is happening.

In other words, we don't want to have to be in the situation where we're saying, I can't see everything that I want to see. I don't know exactly what's going on. I don't understand everything. Instead, we want everything in our view to fit together.

We want it to be within our perspective. We want it to be clear to us. And the gospel says that's not how it works.

[17 : 40] And the gospel is not saying if you believe in Jesus, then you're going to see and understand everything. That's why Christianity will always involve things that are mysterious. It's not going to give you an explanation for everything that you experience in your life.

And there will be times when we will ask questions and our only answer can be, I don't know. Christianity is not about walking by sight.

And for some people, that's off-putting. Because when you think about sight, it's very, very appealing. For going through life, we want to see where we're going.

We want a clear view. We want to understand it all. We want answers. Walking by sight appeals because it sounds good. It sounds safe. It sounds empirical, verifiable, controllable.

It's easy to think, I want to walk by sight. And maybe for some of you here, that's what's holding you back in relation to the gospel. You're thinking, well, I want to see and know and understand. I need to start from the point where I know what's going on.

[18 : 38] I want to walk by sight. You need to think very carefully about that. You need to think very carefully about whether you want to do that. Because if you want to walk only by sight, what's it going to prevent?

What's going to prevent, not prevent, prevent? What is walking by sight going to stop you from doing? It'll stop you exploring.

Because no explorer can see exactly where they're going. It'll stop you being creative. No artist or musician can create something by knowing beforehand whether or not it's going to be brilliant or rubbish.

It'll stop you hoping because hope that is seen is not hope. And worst of all, it'll stop you loving. Because if you love someone, you cannot see for certain that everything is going to work out okay.

You cannot see what life is going to bring into that relationship. You cannot see that everything is going to work out. Exploration, creativity, hope and love, you cannot do any of them if you walk by sight.

[19 : 47] You can only do them if you walk by faith. And that's exactly what Christianity calls us to do. And that's exactly what the Christian life involves.

And that's the second thing I want us to think about. This phrase, we walk by faith, not by sight, is teaching us about what it's like to live as a Christian. It's teaching us about the life of discipleship, about the walk of faith.

Paul uses this expression in the context of the sufferings that he's experiencing. And he compares that to the blessings that we are going to enjoy that await us in the future.

You can see that in 4, 16 and onwards. When it says, we do not lose heart, though, our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things that are seen, but to things that are unseen.

For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. For both Paul and for the Corinthians that he was writing to, suffering was a reality.

[20 : 57] But those sufferings are part of a journey towards something better. That future has an eternal weight of glory, a splendor, a beauty, a magnificence that is beyond comparison to the difficulties that we might encounter now.

In other words, on the Christian walk, the rubbish things that you might be experiencing now because of your faith, they are all going to be worth it.

And here Paul explains more about the difference between faith and sight. Sight involves looking at the realities that can be seen in the here and now, all of which is transient.

Faith involves looking towards realities that cannot be seen, things that are beyond the here and now, things that are eternal.

And again, there's loads that we could say about that, even just recognizing the fact that there are realities that are unseen is a hugely important thing to think about.

[22 : 01] The point that Paul is highlighting that I want us to see here is the fact that if you are a Christian or if you become one, your ultimate home is not here.

Your ultimate home is not here. Paul unpacks that as you come into chapter five. We know that if the tent that's at earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens.

Your ultimate home is when you will be taken to be the Lord, when He inaugurates His new creation, when every one of the Lord's people are brought together in that eternal home.

And that means that every single Christian is on a journey home. We're all on a journey home, we're pilgrims, or as Paul says, we're walking.

Now that has lots of important implications for how we understand this walk, and I want to try and piece it together. So Paul's telling us if you're a Christian or if you become one, you have a home.

[23 : 04] That home is with God in the future. And I want you just to think about that for a moment, because it's incredible. That is your true home.

That's the place where you belong more than anywhere else. That's the place where you fit more than anywhere else. Our home is with God.

That's where He is. That's where He wants you to be. That's where every other Christian who has already passed away is waiting for you to join them. That's where you belong. That's where you will feel most at home.

That is where you will get the warmest and best welcome that you will ever experience. That's your home. You have a home, but that home is not here.

It's in the future. Right now, we're on a journey. We're on a journey towards that home, a journey that involves mountains and valleys, sunshine and storms.

[24 : 02] Every day, you're getting closer. And as you carry on that journey, you can't see the destination with your eyes, because your eyes can only see things that are transient.

That's true, isn't it? Your eyes, my eyes, we can only see things that are fading away. Your home, your eternal home is not transient. It's not fading away.

It's eternal. And so we head towards it, not by sight, but by faith. So you have a home. You're on a journey towards that home.

That's the destination we aim for. That's the path that we are on, and that has one crucial implication for every single one of us.

It means that you cannot stand still. Whoever you are, whatever stage you're at in the Christian journey, whether you've not even started or whether you are decades down that path, you cannot stand still.

[24 : 59] And that raises the question that you need to ask yourself every single Sunday when you come together to worship. Every new week that begins as we come together to worship, you have to ask yourself this question, what is my next step?

We're on a journey. We have a home. We have a destination. That's where we're heading. What is your next step? Maybe for you, the next step is actually the very first step.

To respond to that call that Jesus is giving you again to say, follow me. Maybe for some of you, it's to step back onto a path that you've wandered from, and we all wandered at times.

Maybe for some of you, the next step is to pray for the first time in a very long time. Maybe your next step is to read your Bible again or to read it for the first time.

Maybe your next step is to tell someone else that you actually are already on this path. Maybe you are a believer, but you've never had the courage to say to somebody else, I'm a follower of Jesus.

[26 : 12] Maybe your next step is to leave a sin behind for good, a sin that has plagued you on your journey that you need to leave behind. Maybe your next step is to become more involved in the life of the church.

Maybe your next step is to get alongside someone else to help them in their walk. Maybe your next step is to move on into a leadership role to take more responsibility in your home or in your church family.

Everyone has a next step to take. Everyone has a next step to take, and the key thing is that that step must be taken by faith, not by sight.

If you rely on sight, if your next step, whatever it is, if it's to follow the Lord for the first time, if it's to pray for the first time, if it's to tell someone else that you don't believe it, if it's to get more involved in the church, if it's to step into a leadership role, if you want to take that step by sight, you'll never do it.

Because for every single one of these steps, you cannot see what's going to happen. And that's why you have to take a step of faith.

[27 : 31] And as you do so, your steps have got to be influenced, not by what's going on around you, not by what lies behind you, but by the destination you're heading for.

That's what needs to influence the step that you need to take. And Paul sets that before us so powerfully. Let me read verses 9 and 10 of chapter 5.

Whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what is done in the body, whether good or evil.

He's talking about that last day when Jesus returns. And what happens on that day needs to shape the steps we take on this day.

And during this week. And this is where we see one of the biggest dangers that we face as Christians. We all are in danger of devoting our lives to pleasing the wrong thing.

[28 : 42] We're all in danger of that. It's so tempting to do it. We try to please the things that are around us, whether that's a boss or a spouse or a partner or a group of friends or a set of expectations, an inner ambition, an inner resentment, an inner fear.

Our steps will always be influenced by the things that we want to please. And we have got to make sure that we don't get that wrong.

Please think about that. Think about the steps that your life is on. Think about the directions that you take, the direction that you're traveling, the decisions that you take. Who's influencing them? Who's shaping them?

Whose opinion do you care about? What matters most? We've got to make sure that we don't get that wrong.

And this is why this chapter is so helpful, because it's resetting our perspective. It's getting us to think and walk by faith. It's getting us to look to Jesus.

[29 : 43] It's getting us to think in terms of eternity. And it's reminding us that we're on that walk where we keep walking and we keep walking by faith. The walking part reminds us that we cannot stand still.

There's always a next step that we need to take. The faith part means that we cannot wait until we can see everything. We just need to go for it as individual believers and as a church family together.

Even if the step is hard, Paul is reminding us that the future promise to the Christian is so, so beautiful that every step you take will absolutely be worth it.

And if you are pushing Jesus away today, then the opposite is also true. Because when that day comes, when we appear before the judgment seat of God, when we reach that point and Jesus is not our Savior, and we've followed a different worldview that's rejected the gospel, it will all be because you didn't take that first step.

It will all be because you didn't take that first step where Jesus says, follow me, and you think, no, I'm not going to take that first step. And if that happens, there is one thing that you will be guaranteed to be experiencing in that moment.

[31 : 10] You will look back at whatever reason it is in your head right now that makes you want to not follow Jesus, and on that day you will look back and think, it wasn't worth it.

It wasn't worth it. All of this is teaching us that the Christians walk as a journey that's moving us towards something wonderful.

It's a journey that's taking us home, and God is calling every one of us onto that journey. In that home, there is room for every single one of you.

Last of all, there's two things that a greater understanding of this walk will bring into our lives, and you see them in verse 16 of chapter 4 and verses 2 and 4 of chapter 5.

First of all, we are being reminded that we do not lose heart. We do not lose heart. And secondly, we are being reminded that we groan.

[32 : 20] We do not lose heart, and we groan. And I want to leave you to think about the fact that both of these are brilliant.

We all need something that will renew our hearts as we battle through life, and we all need something that will make us groan. And you might be thinking, really, I don't really want to groan.

Well, you absolutely do want to groan, because a life when your heart is just distracted and doesn't need to be renewed, and a life where you never groan is a shallow life.

And this is actually part of what makes Christianity so intellectually satisfying. It's reminding us that when we look out in the world just now and see that it is so broken, when we see so much suffering, so much injustice, so much pain, so much that's wrong, if you look at that and you think, this is not how it's meant to be, then you are thinking God's thoughts after Him, because that is exactly how God thinks.

He looks at the damage that our sin has caused to the world and to each other and to ourselves, and He groans. And He says, that is not what I want for humanity.

[33 : 36] But the amazing thing about God is that He doesn't just groan, He also acts. And that's what the whole gospel is about, the fact that God has acted to put right the damage of sin.

Paul explains more of that as the chapter goes on, culminating in his words at the very end, speaking about Jesus coming to die in our place, rise again for our salvation.

And Paul says that for our sake He made Him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

And because of that, your heart can be renewed and refreshed. And because of that, we now groan for a better future, for an amazing home where we will be with Jesus, we'll be with one another, we'll be with every other believer that has come before us and who will come after us, and it will be utterly brilliant.

It's an amazing walk to be on by God's grace. Let's go into a new week and into the rest of our lives walking by faith, not by sight.

[34 : 47] Amen. Let's pray. Father, we confess that so often we want to see and understand everything so often we want our lives to be on our terms so often we want you to meet our expectations.

We confess that before you, and we pray that you would renew our hearts, turning us to have a perspective shaped by the Gospel in every single part of our lives.

And we pray that we would all go on from here walking by faith, not by sight, looking to you, longing for you, trusting you, and serving you this day, this week, and for the rest of our lives.

Amen. Thank you.